The purpose of this supplemental information form is to present counseling tools you may want to use when meeting individually with students (especially students who are frustrated, angry, or upset).

Top Ten Tips:

1. **Normalize** the student’s experience. Students are often intimidated or feel like they are the only ones who are having trouble with an assignment. Let them know that it’s completely normal to find an assignment difficult. Some examples might be, “It’s OK to feel frustrated. You worked really hard on that paper and now it’s nowhere to be found,” or, “I think a lot of people are having trouble with this class. I’m glad you came to me!”

2. **Ask open-ended questions.** These are questions that cannot be answered with one word. (A Yes/No question would be considered a close-ended question). This may seem like a simple one, but it can be a bit more difficult than you would expect! You can gather more information about a student and what they are experiencing if you ask open-ended question. For example, instead of saying, “Are you having difficulties with this assignment?” (close-ended question), you might say, “In what ways are you finding this assignment challenging?” More information from the student=TA has an easier time knowing where to target intervention strategies 😊

3. Check in and **reflect how the student is feeling.** Recognize that the student you are working with is probably juggling a lot of balls at any given time (relationships, school, work, family) and may come to you in a highly emotional state. Notice how the student is presenting and reflect that back. For example, you may say, “Wow! You are playing on the basketball team, taking 18 credits and hosting recruits. You sound exhausted and a bit
frustrated." Checking in with the student and reflecting how they are feeling will communicate you care about their well-being.

4. Emphasize mastery over performance. Mastery is acquiring the skills that it takes to get to a goal. Performance is how you do in a pressure situation. It turns out that people who focus on mastering skills (e.g., writing, understanding the material) actually do better on the performance when it comes time (e.g., test). Encourage your students to learn the skills en route to their goal instead of only focusing on the “A”. It leads to the greatest chance for success!

5. Emphasize a growth mindset. Reinforce the fact that academic skills are malleable. For some reason, it’s culturally pervasive to believe that you are born with academic skills (e.g. She’s always been a good writer). In fact, you can become a better writer, a better test-taker, or a better collaborator if you believe you can change and work at it. Sports metaphors work well here. For example, very few people are born with a skill for shooting foul-shots in basketball. People practice, and they get better. The same applies for school.

6. Focus on strengths. Find something good about what the student is doing and explicitly state it in your interaction. For example, you might say, "I know you are having trouble with this class, and I love your attitude in trying to do better" or, "It takes a lot of courage to ask for help sometimes."

7. Reflect content of what the student is saying. It’s as simple as it sounds. All you have to do is repeat back what the student has told you. It’s a quick and easy way to assure the student you are listening and that you are both on the same page. For example, you might say, "So, it sounds like you worked really hard on this assignment. You didn’t get the grade you wanted, and you’re wondering how you might improve for next time." This provides the student the opportunity to fill in any important details you might have missed. Often times, too, the student hearing their issue laid out in basic terms is helpful.

8. You have permission to use counselor phrases. Use phrases like, "I’m wondering...,” “How does that fit for you?” , “It sounds like...” or “Tell me
more about that.” This kind of language conveys caring and a collaborative approach.

9. Use **self-disclosure** when appropriate. No, we are not suggesting you tell students where you went out last weekend, but rather, to disclose information about yourself that might be helpful for the relationship. For example, saying something like, “I remember my first year in college. I didn’t know how I could figure out all the different things I was supposed to do each day!” might be helpful for the student to know that it’s normal to hit some roadblocks throughout the education process.

10. Request a **summary** from the student at the end of your meeting. You might say something like, “Ok, we have about five minutes left in our meeting. Tell me what you thought were some of the most important things we covered today.” Often times, the student and the TA may have different impressions of what was important in the meeting. By checking in with the student, you get an idea of what they will be taking from your time spent together. It may also give you an opportunity to add anything you think they might have missed. So you could say, “That’s a great summary of what we covered. I was wondering about one more thing. It seemed important to you to work on this next assignment a little each day instead of working on it all the night before. How might you accomplish that?” That way, the student leaves with concrete action steps.

Please feel free to contact Maeve O’Donnell at maeve.b.odonnell@gmail.com or Kirsten Graham at kirgraham@gmail.com should you have any questions.

**GOOD LUCK!**